

Brazil News



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Editorializing

Gifts

During the Christmas season we give gifts, because it the birthday appointed to Jesus. Worldwide billions of dollars are spent on every imaginable kind of gifts – and unimaginable. Some are useful, others absolutely useless. We can be certain that only a minuscule portion can be classified as *gold, frankincense, and myrrh*.

Contrary to popular wisdom, and school Christmas programs, the Wise Men did not visit the manger scene, but made their appearance later. The gifts they left Mary and Joseph were of a practical nature as they were soon to discover.

We understand that the shepherds were on the lower rungs of the social ladder, probably uneducated. So when angels announced the astounding news of a miraculous Child born in the outskirts of Bethlehem, they immediately left their sheep and set out for the nearby village.

We have every reason to believe they didn't change out of their rude garments. We have no record of carrying gifts. Indeed, their "gift" was to reverently bow down at the manger and worship the Christ Child. Without a doubt they told of the heavenly angelic message, and listened to Joseph and Mary's report of what had just taken place in the stable. Surely it was a memorable visit for both Joseph and Mary and the shepherds.

The visit of the Wise Men was the inverse of that of the shepherds. They did bring gifts, valuable gifts that could be sold and converted in much needed currency to be used on their trip to Egypt, to flee the king's wrath, and for their sojourn away from home.

Modern Christmas can be seen and heard and felt and tasted. It is an ambience that pervades the very air, homes, religious gatherings, and possibly, more than anything else, commerce. Hundreds of thousands of vehicles, running to and fro, as so many cutter ants, turn highways into a nightmare. Possibly the greatest agony of Christlessmas are the gifts that must be chosen, purchased and wrapped.

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I would like to believe that at least some of you good BN readers find all this frustrating.

What do you buy for someone who already has everything?

What do you do when your credit card becomes a creditlesscard?

How do you deal with emotions when the young recipient of the gift you carefully chose utters a perfunctory “Oh, thanks...” and facially expresses disappointment?

We could go on and on, but you get the point.

Here come a few suggestions (possibly too late for this December 25), that we can learn from the shepherds and Wise Men.

The shepherds.

The shepherds carried no tangible gifts as they hastened to the stable...

Wait! Before continuing, we want to consider what the stable wasn't. Let's just call it a stableless. It had none of the antiseptic smell of a modern maternity ward (the smell was quite different). It wasn't even a hut that would give some protection from the elements and a bit of privacy. Of course, there was no bed nor cot nor floor mat. We hope there was enough clean straw to isolate Mary from the organic fertilizer that covered the floor. There was no cute little v-shaped crib that we see in most manger scenes. (Someone has described the crib as a cattle trough. I think that comes as close as we'll get to reality.)

So, what was the visit of the shepherds like, with no gifts?

Joseph and Mary were fatigued after spending a number of days on the road, probably sleeping under the stars. In addition to the cumbersome journey on a donkey, Mary had just experienced the rigors of bringing a child into the world.

We don't know what their frame of mind was as they tried to make themselves tolerably comfortable in their miserable quarters. Knowing that it was in this squalid stable that they brought the prophesied Savior into world must have, at least, been somewhat depressing.

Thus, as they tried to rest on the hay, they were surprised when they heard low voices and approaching footsteps. Hesitantly three or four men – we don't know how many – stooped as they entered the stable. A quick look around showed them where the Christ Child lay. Reverently they walked to the trough where He lay, bowed their knees, and worshiped the Redeemer of mankind.

After answering questions as to how they found the stable, the shepherds told their story:

“We were out watching our flock, like we do every night. Something felt different. I can't really explain it. It was kind of like when we are at home and hear footsteps approaching. Something tells us that visitors are at the door.

“We looked around, but saw no one. Then above us the sky began to lighten. Not all over, just above us. We were frightened. But as we looked up, there, right in the middle of that light we saw... yes, an angel! We had never seen an angel before, but something told us he was from heaven. Yes, it had to be an angel! .

“This angel had wings and hovered right about us. He was so bright and shining

that it took a bit for our eyes to adjust. We were so frightened that we fell to the ground. Then he began to speak:

“ ‘Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.’ ”

“Then, all of a sudden the sky was filled with these heavenly beings. They praised God and sang:

*“ ‘Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace,
good will toward men.’ ”*

And this was the gift of the shepherds. They reconfirmed what Joseph and Mary already knew, that this Child was indeed the Son of God, the Savior of the world. That shabby stable suddenly was transformed into a palace.

Are you glad when December 25 is past and life can return to a routine? I see some heads nodding. Then learn a lesson from the parable of the shepherds and Wise Men.

When you visit a rest home do you always take a gift? Of course not! Yet, when you walk into the room of a loved one, don't their faces light up with pleasure? Because your *presence* touches their heart.

That is the gift, that costs absolutely nothing, you can give to whomever you meet. This gift is not restricted to rest homes. If you have no inspiration on what kind of a gift you should give to someone, let your life be your gift. If it isn't possible to do it in person, send a note on WhatsApp. Let them know you remember. In just a sentence or two, tell them why you remember, why they hold a special place in your heart. That is a more precious gift than something they don't need and will possibly soon relegate to a junk room in the basement, where it will be forever forgotten.

We strike the same key again:

Let your life be your gift.

Now we go to the Wise Men. Their gift were expensive, gold, frankincense, & myrrh. We doubt if Joseph and Mary, or even the Wise Men, had any idea how useful their gift would prove to be a short time later, when converted into cash, to sustain the time spent in Egypt to flee the wrath of the king.

It was a gift, doubtlessly inspired by God. to fulfil a very real need.

If, as I am suggesting, giving gifts to people who don't need them is an exercise in futility, then let's flip the coin and see the reverse image.

There are those who do need some gold, frankincense, & myrrh. Possibly, sickness, disaster, an accident, financial failures, among myriad other problems that can occur.

For such situations there are 365 days in the Christmas year. Give unobtrusively, generously, from a heart filled with love. Your love, converted into a tangible gift, will never be forgotten. (And if it is, you have done what the Lord suggested you do.)

Share the Lord's blessings in your life with those who are in need. It may do for them what the Wise Men's gifts did for Joseph and Mary.

The Wise Men gave useful gifts. Go and do ye likewise.

Off the Subject – Sort of

Christmas programs, nativity scenes, and most of all, in our minds, we see the star that guided the Wise Men as a beam of stellar light that illuminated their pathway.

I doubt that very much. If that was the case, why did they seek out Herod the king and ask for directions? If it would have been a literal shaft of light, hoards of people would have converged on the house where Joseph and Mary, with the child Jesus lived.

We must remember that back those days, when night was night, with no artificial illumination nor compasses, many people were at least amateur astronomers. They could tell direction by the stars, as well as get an idea of the time.

This is my theory, and take it for what it is worth, or worthless. One night these Wise Men saw a star they had never seen before. They immediately identified its position in relation to another known star. It seemed to twinkle, as if extending an invitation. After a time watching, they noticed it advanced, almost imperceptibly toward the “base star.”

All three men immediately recognized this as a divine message. After several days of preparation they set out, following the star. Each night they eagerly sought out “their star” and travelled in the direction it indicated. If it moved to the right, they would change course to the right, as well as to the left. This led them to the town of Bethlehem. They were familiar with the words of the prophet: “*And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.*”

But where in Bethlehem, among the many houses, was He to be found? Their visit to Herod proved to be of no help. What follows is pure imagination. Slowly walking the streets that night, as the Wise Men approached one of the houses it began to irradiate a subtle glow. And they knew. That was the house! They too had found the Christ Child.

(Except for the imagination, we believe the theory may be accurate.)

Phrases Not Heard

What language will be spoken in Heaven? About the only answer that we can be sure of is that it will not resemble any earthly tongue. Following are some phrases that will never be heard in Heaven:

I'm sorry.
I forgot.
I didn't do it.
I promise.
I just wasn't thinking when I said that.
I'm tired, I think I'll take a nap.
I'm not feeling well.
I'm too busy.
I'll fix it.
Turn on (off) the light.
It's hot (cold).
It's dangerous.
I can't stand being around him/her any longer.
I tried, but didn't manage.
The house needs sweeping.
Doing this is tiresome.
I'm not a singer.
I don't trust him/her.
You can't believe everything you hear.
I'm not joking.
I'm really upset.
You can't fool me.
That is way too expensive.
That is the dumbest thing I have ever heard.
I'll never do that again.
You're not my boss.
I get so bored.

Notes

Pages from my scratch pad

A wise man never knows all; only a fool knows everything. —African proverb

Unlike the brain, the stomach alerts you when it's empty. —African proverb

It is unfortunate when someone has a mouth bigger than his brain. —Thought

Like Moses of old, we all at times need a burning bush. —Found

There are a million roads into hell, but not a single road out. —Found

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Some people don't need counseling; they need deliverance. —Found

You don't love someone for their looks, for their clothes, or for some fancy car, but because they sing a song only you can hear. —Oscar Wilde

The main function of the little toe is to make sure all the furniture is in place. —Found

Light travels slower than sound. This is why some people appear bright until they open their mouth to speak. —Found

Vegetarian is an old Indian name for bad hunter. —Found

Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you will look back and realize they were the big things. —Found

If at first you don't succeed, do it the way your wife told you. —Found

Nothing spoils a good story more than the arrival of an eye witness. —Mark Twain

A good leader is a person who takes a little more of the blame and a little less than his share of the credit. —Found

You better stop disliking people over what you heard, and be thankful God isn't disliking you over what He knows. —Found

A bad attitude is like a flat tire; you don't get very far unless you change it. —Found

Think before you ink. —Found

Elon Musk has the bad habit of deliberately lying to the public. His associates, in respect to their boss don't remind him he is being untruthful. Instead, with their scientific minds, they refer to his deviations from the truth as a "Reality distraction field." Even lies can be dressed up. —Read

My folks subscribed to LIFE Magazine. They stored them up in the attic and I found them. There was a cartoon, "Brother Sebastian," a monk. In one issue he transformed the Greet philosopher Socrates' KNOW THYSELF into NO THYSELF. This fits well into the sparse living conditions of that religious order. And, let's face it, it might not be a bad idea if we would NO OURSELVES more frequently.

Artificial intelligence cannot simulate heart and soul. —Read

Story

Salty coffee

(I ran across this little story and am reprinting it just as I got it.)

This is a story of two, who were on their first date and both were a little bit shy to start the conversation and the girl was even thinking to run home. Sitting nervously for a few moments, the boy asked the waiter:

Would you please bring me some salt? I'd like to have it in my coffee?

Everyone in the cafe looked at him, so strange. He became more nervous and still, he put the salt in his coffee and even drank it. The girl looking at him confused asked: Why do you have this habit?

Well, when I was a kid, we lived near the sea, I liked playing in the sea, I enjoyed the taste of the seawater, just like the taste of salty coffee. It reminds me of my childhood.

While he was answering her, a tear dropped from his eye. She was deeply touched by his story. A man who tells all about his heart must be a man who knows the responsibility of his home and cares about it. They both continued to date. and finally got married one day.

She thought many times, she would have almost missed a wonderful man, if not for the salty coffee. They lived a happy life and she daily made him a salty coffee, as she knew that was the way he liked it.

After living together for 40 long years, he passed away, left her a letter saying: "My love, please forgive me, I lied to you only once in my whole life.

"Here is what happened. Remember the time we first met. I was very nervous. Actually, I wanted sugar but asked for salt. It was hard for me to change so I just had it. I never thought it would be the start of our conversation! I tried to tell you many times but failed. I feared of losing you. Now, on this death bed, I have nothing to lose. So, telling you, I had never tasted salty coffee before. What a strange taste. Having you with me is my biggest achievement in my whole life. If I could live again, I would want it to still be with you, even though I should have to drink salty coffee again for my whole life."

Her tears started to flow down her cheeks making the letter totally wet. One day someone asked her how salty coffee tasted.

She replied: It's sweet.

Remembering

On Telegrams and WhatsApp

When we moved to Brazil our only communication to North America was by telegram. Since it could easily take 36 hours, or more, for a telegram to reach its destination, and then an equal amount of time for a return message. That doesn't take

into consideration the time it would remain in the Post Office until a trip was made into town and the message picked up. So, we can safely say it was usually at least a week until we got the return message.

Our grandson Lincoln, his wife and children, spent some time in the US recently. He was invited to my brother and his wife's place two miles north and two and 1/4 miles east of Galva. He misunderstood the directions and wasn't finding the place. He tried to contact my sister, but she didn't responde. So he sent me a WhatsApp message, which I received immediately, send the proper instructions and in several minutes he found the place with a big Becker sign at the entrance. As it turned out, it was quicker to get instructions from Brazil than from right next door.

If it would have been the old days it would have taken a week for the instructions to arrive.

Thinking out loud

Just

I just can't get over it how Americans are addicted to the little word "just ." We listen to talks from N America. Services normally begin and end with a prayer. I am just amazed at how many "justs" can be uttered in just 60 seconds, e.g. "We just pray that you will bless this service," "We just ask that you will just touch the hearts of the listeners," "May all those present just receive a blessing."

And then, of course, there are those who repeatedly inform us that "I was just thinking..." We assume that public speakers think before arising. We just hope so. That being the case, maybe we would just get the hint, without their informing us they were just thinking.

After living out of the country for nearly 55 years, my English is obviously quite shabby, so just excuse my inability to understand the hidden meaning of "just."

Would someone just explain to me why I just can't seem to get the hang of all this.

**Faith and I wish our readers
a meaningful Christmas
and a New Year of victories.**

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